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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for enriching language use in writing. The targeted population consisted of one classroom of fourth grade students in a public elementary school. This school is in the small rural community near a large city in the Midwest. The problem of lack of language skills in writing was documented with teacher and student rubrics, teacher anecdotal records, student surveys and student work samples. Analysis of probable cause indicated that there was a lack of necessary language skills needed to incorporate detail and emotion in writing. This lack affected various situations including reading desires and self esteem. Review of the research indicated students disliked reading, had a low self concept, and lacked positive school experiences. A review of the solution strategies suggested by other researchers, combined with the analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the development of solutions to increase independent reading, create language rich experiences, use a variety of teaching strategies with positive and effective feedback, to change the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing. The program included lessons which encouraged students to explore language use through writing experiences. Post intervention data indicated that the students benefited from a program which focused on writing using descriptive vocabulary. As a result of the intervention, the students appropriately used descriptive vocabulary in writing with more frequency and developed a positive perspective regarding their own writing abilities. (Contains 26 references and 5 tables of data. Appendixes provide information on the 600 minute reading program, an acrostic rubric, an expository rubric, a plant/animal rubric, and an anecdotal record form.) (Author/RS)

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ED 443 129

IMPROVING LANGUAGE SKILLS TO INCORPORATE DETAIL IN STUDENT'S WRITING

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development
Field Based Masters Program
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my family and friends. Your support and patience is an endless source of strength.

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for enriching language use in writing. The targeted population consisted of one classroom of fourth grade students in a public elementary school. This school is in the small rural community near a large city in the Midwest. The problem of lack of language skills in writing was documented with teacher and student rubrics, teacher anecdotal records, student surveys and student work samples.

Analysis of probable cause indicated that there was a lack of necessary language skills needed to incorporate detail and emotion in writing. This lack affected various situations including reading desires and self esteem. Review of the research indicated students disliked reading, had a low self concept, and lacked positive school experiences.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by other researchers, combined with the analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the development of solutions to increase independent reading, create language rich experiences, use a variety of teaching strategies with positive and effective feedback, to change the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing. The program included lessons which encouraged students to explore language use through writing experiences.

Post intervention data indicated that the students benefited from a program which focused on writing using descriptive vocabulary. As a result of the intervention the students appropriately used descriptive vocabulary in writing with more frequency and developed a positive perspective regarding their own writing abilities.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted fourth grade class lack the language skills needed to incorporate detail in terms of description and emotion in their writing. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes teacher and student checklists, student surveys, teacher anecdotal records, and student work samples.

Immediate Problem Context

Demographic information pertaining to the intermediate grade level site involved in this project was taken from the 1998 School Report Card. The elementary site researched is part of a small, but growing district. The elementary building enrollment is 361 students, kindergarten through fifth grade. There are three sections for each grade, first through fifth grades, and morning and afternoon sections of kindergarten. There are 55 students are in the fourth grade. The average fourth grade classroom has 19 students. The average class size for the district is 20 students. The

pupil to certified staff is 14.1:1. The middle school building enrollment is 172 students in grades six through eight. The ethnic background of the elementary building is: 92.8% White, 5.0% Hispanic, 1.4% Black, 0.6% Asian, and 0.3% Native American. Low income students comprise 3.6% of the elementary building's population having no children with limited English proficiency. Of the total elementary population, 95.7% attend school regularly. The middle school has one principal and the elementary building has one principal who is also superintendent for the district. There are 37 teachers, in which 89.1% are female and 10.9% are male. The average teaching experience for the district is 11.9 years, with 54.6% of the teachers having a Bachelor's Degree and 45.4% of the teachers having a Master's Degree and further. The average teacher's salary is $37,306 with the average administrator's salary being $102,334.

The school's educational curriculum includes reading, grammar and writing, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, art, computer, and music. Each academic subject is taught once daily, approximately 45 minutes devoted to the "fine arts" per week. This is one of two buildings in the district located in a rural community.

The Surrounding Community

The school district is located in a rural community with a water recreational area. The current population is 6,500 people, of which two-thirds are professionals and one-third is "blue collar." The population's per family median income is $37,894 per year. The median value of the occupied single family home is $94,400. Two thirds of the population commute to work an average of 32.5 minutes out of the county, with one third employed in the county.

The population of this community is expected to increase dramatically. The school is using every space possible, with no unused rooms in the building. In the fall of 1998, the district successfully sought 7.5 million dollars in a referendum. A 61 acre site has been purchased in which construction for the new school buildings is set to begin in the spring of 1999. By the year 2010, construction is to be completed and full occupancy is expected. According to projections, prepared by the Department of Planning, Zoning & Environmental Quality, there is an anticipated increase of 156 students, during the 1999-2000 school year. The current district enrollment is 553 students. All of these students will be expected to use expressive language in their writing.

National Context of the Problem

The 1998 Writing Report Card prepared by the U.S. Education Department's National Assessment of Educational Progress found that even though schools have increased the emphasis in writing instruction and most students know the basics, many students continue to have serious difficulty producing effective writing, which is described in the NAEP handbook. Illinois has realized and addressed this concern since 1989 by setting expectations for narrative, persuasive, and expository styles of writing. This writing is assessed in the State Standardized Achievement Test, taken each year. Due to this testing, most instruction is focused on the three types of writing. The instruction approach to writing has been formalized by these tested styles. The narrative style of writing that is evaluated, is one's own retelling a story or event. The goal of this type of writing is to create a picture in the reader's mind. The persuasive style of writing's goal is to sway or persuade the reader's point of view to appreciate the writer's perspective. The objective in the expository style of writing is to give information in a clear comprehensible manner. Teachers may feel pressured to include writing in the daily curriculum, with no extra time given in the school day. Most educators have restructured their daily routines to incorporate writing across the curriculum. Caution

should be used when a writing curriculum is incorporated, to make sure that writing is not simply plugging in answers to questions. It seems that many students enter school with positive attitudes regarding writing, but after years of academic writing, learn to dislike writing. Students need to develop a confidence in their writing so that they may continue to experiment with writing and become flexible and expressive writers.

Improving writing is an ongoing problem in schools today. It can be hindered or cultivated by adult's involvement. As Pflaum (1974) states, according to Piaget's theory, " cognitive development determines the course of language growth." (p. 6) This paper will show that increasing a learner's experiences will help children become confident and willing writers. As Lewis (1979) states, "Words are becoming new tools, not only for serious work but for the fun of demonstrating cleverness to others and to oneself" (p.133). Using effective language and vocabulary to write well is an important skill which needs to be taught carefully. The targeted fourth grade students have shown to have a lack in descriptive language skills, some causes of this problem will be explored further in the next chapter. Possible causes for the existence of this problem include the students' dislike for reading, a lack in variety of

teaching strategies, poor self-esteem, a lack of personal experiences, and the frequency television and computer games impel the students.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of student's lack of language skills in descriptive writing at the site, during the first two weeks of school, student surveys were analyzed and recorded. Student checklists and work samples were selected and completed by the students at the target site. Teacher checklists and anecdotal records were used by one classroom teacher at the site and used in the data analysis.

Student Survey

All data discussed regarding students was taken from a sample of 21 students. The students were given an open-ended survey regarding each child's own writing abilities. The classroom teacher went through each question with the class, and discussed possible answers to each question. The students were encouraged to answer honestly and in complete thoughts. Table 1 shows the percentage of students who feel they are able to write descriptively.

Table 1

Do kids feel they write descriptively (August 27, 1999)?

Answer	Number of Students	% of Students
Yes	15	71.4%
No	4	19.1%
Sometimes	2	9.5%

There are almost a third of the students surveyed who felt they were unable to or only sometimes able to add description of details when asked to because they needed guidance. The students described a lost feeling or felt unable to keep up. The students' helplessness may lead to a feeling of frustration. The students' feelings of frustration can develop into a negative attitude towards all types of writing. The student survey was the first piece of evidence demonstrating children having difficulty adding detail and emotion to a written piece. Another tool used in the research at the targeted site was a teacher checklist.

Teacher Checklist

The teacher checklist was an evaluative tool to monitor the students' interaction and effort given for each activity. The teacher checklist was completed by the classroom teacher at the site once a week for the first three weeks. The teacher checklist consisted of five

writing expectations that were established during the specific period. For example, whether the class uses creative language or ideas in a given writing assignment or whether the individual students work well independently. The teacher also has available a space for comments regarding each writing lesson. The teacher checklist involved five indicators which implied students' writing abilities lacked descriptive and emotion filled language use. Results may be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher Checklist Indicators and Results

Indicators	Yes/Aug.	No/Aug.
-Students work independently.	45%	55%
-Students use resources.	49%	51%
-Descriptive language used.	39%	61%
-Minor spelling & punctuation errors.	47%	53%
-Correct use of structure.	38%	62%

By tabulating the results of the checklists, a deficit in the children's positive feelings regarding their own perceptions of their abilities to use descriptive language in writing was found. This checklist was consistently used and proved to be a necessity for each lesson for the teacher. A second tool used in the targeted research was a

student checklist.

Student Checklist

The student checklist was an optional evaluative tool for the individual students to not only communicate to the teacher whether a lesson was an effective writing lesson for them, but to evaluate their own writing using predetermined criteria. The students were encouraged to complete the checklists after each writing lesson. After reviewing the completed student checklists, it was discovered by the teacher, a lack of application on the part of the children. The children felt it was all "too much work." The teacher's organizational tool was not looked upon favorably. The researcher deduced that completing more paperwork was proof that a problem exists. The next documentation of the writing problem used was a student survey.

Teacher Anecdotal Records

Teacher anecdotal records were taken either directly after the lesson, or at the end of the lesson's day. A description of the lesson as well as a P.M.I. was completed following the writing activities. The pleasures and difficulties were noted from the student's actions and their final written pieces. The students were noted moaning and the student's wanting a lot of individual help during the first three anecdotal recordings. This noting of the

students' displeasure was assumed that the students did not enjoy the lesson, furthermore, the teacher felt the students were not giving the task their full efforts. The final method of documentation for the existence of the problem is student work samples.

Student Work Samples

The student's were asked during the first week of school, and at the end of the first semester to write about one of their own stuffed animals. This assignment was to be approximately one paragraph describing how the animal would act, and if it changed it's appearance if it were a real animal. The students seemed to enjoy discussing the topic, but when it came to writing the first week of school, the pieces were simple and inexpressive. The pieces used very few adjectives, adverbs, or descriptive language. The problem of nondescript and emotionless writing exists in the targeted classroom. Some of the probable causes for the fourth grade's difficulty using descriptive language in their writing will be discussed.

Probable Causes

In order to fully comprehend the probable causes of the lack of language skills needed to add detail in writing observed in the fourth grade classroom, it is important to understand why this occurs. Being able to express emotion and description in writing seems to be a difficult task for

fourth grade students.

The following are causes for the lack of emotional and detailed language in student's writing: dislike reading, low self esteem, lack of positive experiences, television and computer games, and a lack in variety of teaching strategies.

Dislike Reading

In the targeted site, it has been noted through anecdotal records that students have an aversion to reading. Some students have had negative reading experiences or not enough positive reading experiences. These experiences affect the child's outlook toward reading and literature. It has been documented in anecdotal records, during a 20 minute silent reading period, approximately 6 out of 21 students were constantly getting up to choose another novel to read. When students have a good understanding of the process of getting meaning from the written word, reading is a pleasurable activity. According to Ekwall & Shanker (1989):

> A balanced reading program best serves most students' needs… You also need to incorporate the most beneficial aspects of the language experience approach and whole language or literature based approaches, so that your students can learn how to read and love reading. (p. ix)

(p. ix)

Current research has shown that young children generally have a positive feeling towards reading, but due to school occurrences, students somehow lose this admiration. According to Leonhardt (1997):

> Kids usually enter school feeling friendly towards books and reading. But when they are made to read books they see little sense in and are told that the books they like aren't good enough for school reading, they soon lose interest in reading altogether. (p. 82)

It is an ongoing responsibility for parents, teachers, and any other influential adult to promote a love of reading, but this does not always occur.

Some children lose or never gain an appreciation for reading. As Leonhardt (1997) states, "There can be many reasons for a dislike of reading, ranging from early difficulty in learning how to read, to unfortunate school experiences, to a peer group that disparages readers" (p. 82). Too many adults who have a child in their lives, don't promote or display a genuine interest in reading. Some role models for students don't foster and encourage a love of books.

Poor attitudes toward reading are learned behaviors and seriously effects a child's ability to use language effectively. If a poor attitude is developed, then not

only is the writing pursuit affected, but reading becomes affected as well. "A student not only learns to read by reading and write by writing but they also learn to read by writing and write by reading" (Goodman & Goodman, 1983, p. 593). From information gathered through anecdotal records, one fourth grade student had a reading level of 2.3(according to his third grade Stanford Testing Service Test), and had a basic language writing ability using only simple sentence structure and rarely any descriptive vocabulary. This child had an aversion to reading in any shape or form in the classroom and at home, and the parents avowed to not model a healthy respect for literature.

If children are not exposed to positive reading experiences early in their lives, they are less apt to grow up with the desire to read. According to Graves (1990),

> A very small part of our population, about 3%, buys 95% of the books sold in the bookstore, graphic evidence of the nonsuccess of our basal reading programs. The children in these programs do not become adult readers. (p. 39-40)

It seems that some positive sounding reading programs are not beneficial to all students reading experiences and attitudes. A dislike for reading plays an important role in the lack of language skills used in writing. The

lack of variety in teaching strategies was also found to be a reason for lagging descriptive language skills in writing.

Lack in Variety of Teaching Strategies

In the targeted site, it has been noted through anecdotal records that there exists a lack in variety of teaching strategies. According to Tiedt (1983), "Teachers aren't teaching students to write, and its corollary, children aren't learning to write" (p.1). The techniques used in this targeted fourth grade classroom have some alterations in methodology, but usually, it has been free write time period. Students in this site don't receive much variety in the classroom instruction of writing; it has usually been individual teacher-student conferences to check grammar, spelling, content, and fluency. There were rarely any whole or small group writing activities. The program had, in the past, been dreaded by approximately half of the class. Writing time was a structured quiet time in which the only conversation was the teacher and student conferencing. According to Honig (1996),"Students should have an organized writing program. Writing should prepare students to tell a story, organize a report, and explain a phenomenon according to acceptable rubrics" (p.129). At the site, the students were occasionally permitted to conference with their peers. This process was used for peer editing for final drafts, but the teacher was dissatisfied with the

amount of spelling, grammar, and fluency errors. Prior, periodic instruction of editing techniques was done, on an overhead, but the teacher's interpretation of peer edited work was not found to be acceptable. The teacher was frustrated with the amount of errors left by the peer editors and authors, so the teacher would return to teacher student conferencing. The writing time constructively served only the children who were conferencing with the teacher in the 30 minute writing block. Because no feedback was given to a majority of the students, frustration was experienced by the students as well as the teacher.

As reported, a lack in variety of teaching strategies played an important part in causing a negative attitude towards writing. Self esteem was also found to be a reason for inadequate vocabulary use in writing.

Self Esteem

In the targeted fourth grade classroom, it has been noted through teacher anecdotal records that the student's self esteem, during writing time was bordering on low. The students were constantly at a loss for topics or how to progress on a piece of writing. Student's feelings of inadequacy and poor self worth developed as a result of the instructor's methods. As Tiedt (1983) states, "Children engaged in writing must feel they can succeed, and a writing

program must be designed with that need in mind"(p.3). The teacher, in this case study, was not motivating nor planning a program in which the child felt successful. In this targeted group, the children were to write on any self chosen topic with little interaction or feedback on the child's writing. The child was subject to his/her own self criticism or feelings of where to go next with their piece. These self imposed feelings, due to a lack of interaction with others, manifested themselves into feelings of inadequacy and poor self esteem.

Writing instruction starts as an exciting period in a child's educational experience. Graves (1994) states, "On paper, children express themselves freely in first grade, but gradually lose their creative freshness" (p.3). Teachers frequently stick with one method of instruction, but as student's formal writing education progresses, they are challenged with more expectations or rules to follow, without the opportunity to accomplish successful feelings on a regular basis. The lack of regular positive success can hinder the child's creativeness. Due to the absence of successful feelings, the child's self esteem suffers.

Guidelines not given. A student's self esteem may also suffer when clear guidelines are not given for a writing assignment. Green (1997) reports, "The genres they feel most competent with are the ones which have a clear format

which they can follow"(p.8). Some students can't figure out what the teacher expects from them, therefore the budding author is stifled from the very beginning of the activity. The lack of knowledge of the expectations can foster a negative attitude towards the assigned piece. Green (1997) continues, "They equate personal writing with failures in writing in school - they could never decide what the teacher wanted them to produce" (p.3).

In the targeted fourth grade classroom, a student survey was completed in the spring of 1999. Of the 19 students responding, 21% of the population felt negatively with regard to writing. The reasons cited were that writing was boring, their hand hurt, or they have trouble creating ideas. Another possible cause for the lack of expressive content in writing as documented in the student survey was the response when given a topic on which to write. Of the students surveyed, 16% felt that if the topic was something familiar or easily researched it depended upon the assignment, the selected topic was looked upon favorably. Fifty eight percent of the students felt good about being given a topic, while 26% felt bad. The group which felt negatively about being given a topic, felt so because the students might not like the topic, don't like writing in general, or have developed a poor self esteem. With 42% of

the population not feeling confident when given a topic, it is feasible the writer is less willing to experiment with language. The targeted students had, in this fourth grade class, the opportunity to write on a subject disliked or unfamiliar to them, but the challenge wasn't unattainable. In other words, the students were assigned a writing activity, and some children felt unfamiliar with the topic, but all of the children in the targeted classroom were compelled to complete the writing piece. If the challenge is too difficult, the child may feel defeated, then their self confidence and outlook regarding writing may be negatively affected.

Writing not nurtured. Writing is an integral communication skill that is not always nurtured through a child's educational experiences. From a child's first exposure to personal writing, their excitement and proudness can be shattered. Graves & Stuart (1985) state, "For most children, first grade signals the start of a long decline in self confidence…" (p.30). Proof for this statement was delivered in a 1980 Maine student survey given to one group of first graders asking, "Are you a writer?" or "Do you know how to write?" The teachers were surprised when 76% of the group answered yes, they could write. These questions were then asked again when the students reached third, fourth, and fifth grade. By the time this same group reached third

and fourth grade, the answers were less confident, and by fifth grade only 40% of these students considered themselves writers. Progressively, negative images of the student's ability to write have been introduced and little had been done to remedy this low self esteem.

Self esteem is an important variable in causing children's writing to lack emotion and description. The child's own lack of personal experiences were also found to be a cause for emotionless and nondescript writing.

Lack of Experiences

In the targeted fourth grade classroom, it has been noted by teacher anecdotal records that students come from a background in which there has been a deficit of positive expressive language usage. For example, in the targeted classroom, analogies were introduced. The classroom teacher had a difficult time getting the children to create their own analogies using weekly spelling words after 30 minutes of instruction completed on the overhead. Not enough encouragement has been given for the students to use language in varied ways. Too often teachers assign classes to write stories or essays. The assigned writings have no variety in form, thought, or presentation. This expected type of writing becomes mundane, rather repetitive, and can develop a sense of boredom and negativity towards writing. A child's life is not repetitive nor boring, yet teachers

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A child's life is not repetitive nor boring, yet teachers have requested the child's experiences to be scribed on a blank piece of notebook paper. No creativeness was used in the planning, preparation, or presentation of the lesson. This practice can make the child's experience boring or uninteresting.

Occasionally, a student may have "nothing to write about." These students may not have gone away on vacation last summer, spring break, or last Christmas; but that does not mean they sat in a room void of any sensual stimulation. Some children may feel their experiences were not as grand as other's and this may suppress those student's desire to share their experiences for fear of what the reader may think if it is compared to another child's more exciting adventure. It has been the researcher's experience that, teachers, whether unconsciously or not, readily praise a story which includes a lot of events, and simply request more detail to a story which may have minimal events. The child may be at a loss as to knowing the teacher's goal for this piece. The teacher does not remember or use any of the techniques that helped develop their own positive attitudes towards writing. Graves (1994) reminds us, "Recall names of past teachers who affected students' learning." (p. 5) Some teachers don't use classroom experiences in which the students can take a good feeling away from the writing

period. As Graves (1994) continues, "The students aren't having enough writing experiences that will change or increase the child's love for writing" (p. 3).

The child's lack of positive writing experiences change their entire attitude regarding using language creatively in all forms, especially writing. Television and computer games have also shown to be a cause for the lack of expressive language in writing.

Television and Computer Games

In the targeted fourth grade classroom, it has been noted by speaking with the parents during parent teacher conferences or in less formal instances, like a hallway after school that television and computer games can deter a child's creative language use. In this classroom, games as well as word processing are offered for the students to use on the classroom computer. More times than not, the students are playing games in which writing or language usage is not the goal. Although there is encouragement and even extra time permitted for word processing, generally, the children choose games which do not model creative language use, for their computer choice time.

The television is another option for a child to choose during free time at home, as opposed to a reading or writing activity. Children spend a lot of time watching television

or playing video games. Ekwall & Shanker (1989) state, "they have not developed a reading habit, do not know how to select books, and/or do not know where to go to select a book," (p. 347). This is true of approximately five children out of the targeted 21 students. During library time, the classroom teacher is responsible for showing the class how to use a card catalog. The first week of school, the teacher had to personally show the five students one on one how to use the card catalog, after explaining it to the class as a whole. No motivation to become involved with literature, in any form, is offered and not enough intrinsic rewards have occurred for the children. Leonhardt (1997) states the following:

> Television shows can desensitize us to violence, while reading and writing sensitize us. We are right there, experiencing the horror or adventure with the victim. In addition, in horror or suspense books for young people, evil is always overcome at the end, usually with the help of courageous children. (p. 20)

Children have not been exposed to the benefits of a rewarding language program. Memorable, positive language activities which foster creative writing enhancement are not being utilized by the teacher and are not being experienced by the students.

Although students in the targeted fourth grade

classroom have shown to have a lack in descriptive language skills, some solutions to investigate will be discussed further in the next chapter. Some solution strategies to be attempted are to increase independent reading programs, use a variety of teaching strategies, use positive feedback, create language rich experiences, and to change the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

All students will experience writing for a purpose, as well as for pleasure. Using expressive and descriptive language in one's writing is an important skill to have. The possible causes for the lack of descriptive vocabulary in writing have been discussed, and it has been determined that students are challenged daily to use language effectively. The topics for discussion, that have been found to be solutions for students who lack language skills to incorporate emotion and detail in writing include: increasing independent reading, using a variety of teaching strategies and multiple intelligences, using effective and positive feedback, creating language rich experiences, and changing the focus from television and computer games, to reading and writing.

Increase Independent Reading Programs

It is important for children's independent reading time

to be maximized both in and out of the classroom. As mentioned earlier, frequent positive exposure to literature may enrich a child's written work. In the targeted classroom, noted by anecdotal records, students who are proficient in reading usually have better language skills, and are more apt to read for pleasure. The 600 Minute Reading Club, sponsored by America Online, is a voluntary reading program in which a student reads for 600 minutes outside of school. The reward for reading 600 minutes in two months, is a pass for a local theme/amusement park. The program is a success for a majority of students who have the fortitude to attempt the program. Many of the students participate for receipt of the amusement park ticket. Due to the length of the program, the students realize the ease with which the ticket may be attained. The motivation for completion of this program is high due to the popularity of the facility.

Another activity to increase independent reading time is BOOK IT, sponsored by Pizza Hut. This program provides individual and group incentives for spending time in and out of school reading. Each participant that reads a classroom or grade level determined amount of books or pages per month receives a certificate for a free individual sized pizza. An individual certificate may be earned each month the program is in effect. In order for the group to receive

the reward of a class pizza lunch, 100% of the classroom's students must have 100% participation for the program's duration for the school year. The success rate for the BOOK IT program is high because the children of this community enjoy going out for dinner, especially pizza.

Increasing independent reading time is the first solution to improving a child's language skills used in writing. The second solution is to use a variety of strategies teaching in the classroom.

Use a Variety of Teaching Strategies

The classroom teacher is responsible for providing as many language rich learning experiences as possible. Using an educational program that encourages vocabulary development will positively influence a student's writing and learning experience. As Lewis (1979) states,

> She knows that all have a tremendous urge to learn and that it is up to her to provide the materials and many of the problems they can profitably attack, as well as the atmosphere and broad range of experiences that encourage learning. (p. 20)

Children enjoy learning in a variety of ways and when teachers use different techniques, it keeps learning interesting for everyone involved. As Arnold (1991) states,

> In a dynamic and interactive learning classroom the

> teacher will encourage exploration and self expression through reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the belief that students have the ability and the need to make sense of their world through experiences in a range of discourses. At the same time the teacher will have a well developed working model of what constitutes development in literacy and will be able to structure language tasks in ways that promote that development. (p.7)

In review of Howard Gardner's eight intelligences, some researchers believe that each child is gifted. Lazear (1999) feels a student's giftedness can be awakened and encouraged by experiencing a variety of activities which use each of the intelligences.

The first of the eight intelligences is called verbal/linguistic and deals with language and all of its extensions. For example, the verbal/ linguistic intelligence focuses on poetry, story telling, writing, symbolic thinking, and reading. By encouraging this intelligence's facets in a writing curriculum, a student's writing may benefit as a result.

Logical/mathematical is the second of Gardner's intelligences. This intelligence is associated with scientific thinking, inductive, and deductive reasoning. The skill of seeing connections between separate pieces of

information, and having the ability to communicate or record the connection is a terrific writing experience to encourage writing skills.

Visual spatial intelligence is another intelligence to be explored. It mainly deals with the sense of sight and the ability to form images in the mind. To foster the visual spatial intelligence in writing, descriptive language is a useful tool and should be encouraged during instruction.

The fourth intelligence, bodily/kinesthetic, is based in the concept that people learn best by physically doing something, and that our bodies know things that our minds don't know. This intelligence is useful in writing. Students may be pleasantly surprised when challenged to express how they feel during, or giving directions to a physical activity.

The musical/rhythmic intelligence to be explored deals with one's sensitivity to sounds from their environment. Incorporating the musical/rhythmic intelligence in a writing curriculum may be a valuable inclusion. Perhaps listening to a rain forest sounds cassette during a poetry lesson may evoke a student's creativity.

The sixth intelligence is called interpersonal, and involves one's ability to work with people and communicate

effectively with other people. This intelligence is beneficial to any linguistic curriculum. A student may encounter a variety of situations, and while working in a group, and effective expression is a good skill to have in any situation.

Intrapersonal is the seventh of Gardner's eight intelligences. The intrapersonal intelligence describes one's ability to step out of ourselves and watch the situation unfold as an outside observer. The practice of recording or describing how one views a situation can be a noteworthy technique used to enhance descriptive writing.

Finally, the naturalist intelligence, Gardner's eighth intelligence will be described. The naturalist intelligence involves the ability to appreciate nature, as opposed to man-made creations. Combining an admiration for the natural world and recording one's own interpretation may be a well-founded strategy used to bolster descriptive language in writing.

As Lazear (1999) states, "We have within ourselves the capacity to activate all of our intelligences" (p. 7). Using various methods of writing instruction can enhance a child's vocabulary and skill usage.

Some instructors use verbal interaction to enhance vocabulary and writing skills. By discussing written work, it is believed that a child's clarity and vocabulary is

further developed for purposes of greater understanding. As Lewis (1979) states, "Children often discover through discussion purposely led by the teacher to jolt the children into examining, searching, and listening to others"(p.50-51). Interaction among the children and the teacher can richly influence the child's vocabulary selection.

Teacher's may also have a specific plan for each lesson. These writing teachers may share their scheme with the class. As stated by Green (1997), "The class was very excited when I outlined what I had in mind for the writing sessions" (p. 3). The students get more out of a lesson when they are informed of what the expectations are and what may occur in the writing lesson. The preexistent goal and outlined lesson given by the teacher, helps students writing skills by freeing them to enjoy and get the most out of the lesson and language because the student knows the teacher's plan of attack.

The sited school uses a variety of language and reading instruction. The sited classroom uses workbooks as a base for the language instruction, and basals and children's novels for the reading instruction. Some instructors recommend a language/reading program which combines them both. "In the late 60s we wrote about and taught the language experience approach-that is [teaching children] to

read and write their own stories and to read those of other pupils as well as a wide choice of children's literature rather than basals exclusively" (Spache, as cited by Putnam, 1994, p. 2). It is important for the student to use their own knowledge when writing for themselves or editing another's work. The proofreading of another person's work is an opportunity to view other's ideas and creativeness. Children learn from other children in the classroom, and it is also a time for the child to expand their own vocabulary through brainstorming and discussion. Brainstorming, poetry, journaling, learning logs, and writer's workshops are other strategies that can be used.

Brainstorming. Other educators encourage jotting down of ideas, or brainstorming, when beginning to create a written piece. These instructors believe that getting ideas written on paper is a valuable tool for teaching expressive writing. Norton & Norton (1999) state, "The teacher needs to use instructional activities that help children develop discussion skills, questioning techniques, and creative thinking abilities" (p.12). They are not as concerned with a well written first draft, as they are with getting interesting first impressions and ideas for the intended piece. Green (1997) states, "I wanted the class to focus on the writing process the way we get material down, rather than sticking at the surface level and concentrating on a

perfect product from the start" (p. 4). The technique may not be as intimidating as instructing the students to "write a story" and looking at a blank piece of paper. At least the student has formulated some tentative possible ideas for the intended writing. Brainstorming thoughts may help a child focus on how to organize and elaborate on their language. If the child knows the teacher is not concerned with a perfect piece from the start, he is more apt to write freely without reservations and let creativity take a major role in the piece. Using anecdotal records, it has been noted, creativity is important while writing so the child can feel the freedom to experiment with vocabulary and expressive language. By not stressing the whole writing project from the onset, and concentrating on the parts of the whole, when placing the pieces of the whole together, the outcome is sure to be a richer language experience for the author as well as the reader.

Poetry. Using poetry as a part of writing instruction has also been found to be a valuable teaching strategy to expand vocabulary and descriptive writing. As Frazier & Wellen (1998) state, "… each individual can go out of herself and make meaningful connections to the world only if she is provided with the opportunities that value reflection and imaginative process" (p.3). Poetry can be, for some

children, the way their creativity and imagination work best. It can encourage students to play with words in creative ways without the risk of failure. By encouraging students to play with words in poetry, their longer writing pieces may become more descriptive and emotion filled. There is a lot of benefit from encouraging students to play with words while learning to write poetry. It has been noted through anecdotal records that poetry is a necessary element for any writing curriculum, as it's inclusion may increase the likelihood of emotion in other types of writing.

Journaling. Journaling between teacher and student can be an excellent learning experience. Including journal time in a classroom setting allows children to reflect on a past occurrence or respond to a previous correspondence. As Cox (1996) states, "They are valuable because they make connections between thinking aand language, speaking and writing, teacher and child" (p.337). Journaling allows the teacher and student to develop a special relationship through nongraded letter writing communication. For the teacher, it's progressive writing samples from the students; and for the student, it's a constantly growing relationship also modeling correct form and descriptive letter writing. Heller, as cited in Peyton & Staton,(1991) states, "Dialogue journals especially support children's expressive writing by

encouraging written dialogues between teacher and child" (p. 10).

Learning logs. Various educators at the sited school use nongraded student learning logs to enhance their expressive writing. At the end of each school day, the students are to record the events or learnings from each subject, whether or not they enjoyed the lesson and why, within the logs. The teacher may review the children's records and, possibly write comments within their logs as well. This metacognition for the child may help the child while reviewing for a test or perhaps build a more diverse vocabulary which will help a child communicate with greater definition. As Silberman (1989) states, "Keeping journals and learning logs is a way for students to express their feelings about learning math - or about feeling overwhelmed by concepts they couldn't grasp" (p. 158). Perhaps the child will discover or attempt to use a typically mathematical term while describing their emotions regarding an English lesson. This discovery of using language formerly thought of in one way, can be creatively used in a completely different context. Student learning logs may allow certain freedoms for children to experiment with their knowledge and use of language.

Writer's workshop. Writers' workshop is another strategy for classrooms concentrating on descriptive writing improvement. As Heller, (1991) states, "Writer's workshop is a small group setting which children read and critically respond to one another's work in progress, under the guidance and supervision of the classroom teacher" (p. 271). Typically, a written piece to be shared should be a first draft, from which it is constructively criticized and questioned. Suggestions and inquiry from peers involve the child in mental and verbal interaction in which a child is free to add the reader's creative description and explanations to the piece. Teacher and student conferences on written pieces are also a part of writers' workshops. This type of conferencing gives the teacher and student opportunities to get to know one another as individuals as well as one another's interests and concerns. Then during the conference, the teacher has an opportunity to encourage the child to clarify and use descriptive language for a work in progress. It has been noted through anecdotal records, that writers' workshop is a valid and beneficial strategy for improving the use of descriptive language in writing. It also incorporates elements of effective and positive feedback.

Effective and Positive Feedback

Another strategy to be discussed in the problem of

dealing with the lack of expressive language in writing is the use of effective and positive feedback. The use of consistent communication may be an integral element in an effective writing program. Possible techniques include: rubrics, positive writing experiences, posting and publishing, and creative language exercises. These activities can be used in order to increase communication between and expectations for the teacher and students.

Rubric use. As a portion of writing assessment, creating rubrics is an intriguing concept for enhancing descriptive and emotional language in writing. A rubric is a scoring tool which describes the criteria for evaluating a given piece. Fiderer (1998) states, "Rubrics may be altered or developed for almost any project or work" (p. 3). Rubrics at the targeted site were usually shared with a student prior to a project's commencement. Sharing rubrics before students actually begin a task, benefit both teacher and student. Teachers benefit prior sharing because the instructor has a clear direction of the instruction and terminology from the rubrics. The benefit students receive from sharing rubrics is they know the objectives of the project, and can work to achieve the predetermined criteria. Fiderer, (1998) states, "... once your students have a clear understanding of just what you're looking for in a product

or performance, they're more likely to produce better work" (p. 7).

Writing with description and emotion is important, and the use of effective and positive feedback is a valuable practice for teachers and students to increase the frequency of this type of language. If student's work is approached in a favorable manner, the student is more likely to feel free to experiment with the use of language in their writing. It is necessary for teachers, as well as peers, to consider the author's sense of pride and accomplishment for a written piece and offer constructive suggestions or questions.

Sharing. One way educators and peers may be helpful and a positive influence on the author is by sharing the piece with others. Through the teacher's guidelines for a given assignment, the students are aware of the standards to be met, and work to achieve the goals. Stated by Graves (as cited in Smith, 1998), "Once students become aware of what constitutes good writing, and get the help with the elements that make it better, they work hard to make the quality of their writing match their intentions" (p. 25). The peer/teacher and peer/peer conferencing allows students of various abilities and experiences to be exposed to and learn from other's pieces.

Positive writing experiences. It is also valid to include as many chances for students to experience positive writing experiences when working on improving descriptive language in writing. Children who have been exposed to repeated opportunities in which they incur successful writing experiences will hopefully help build their own good outlook towards themselves and their writing skills. Ekwall & Shanker,(1989) state, "It is important to provide opportunities for children's success, … to enhance their self-concepts" (p. 131). A strong self-concept is important for a child to hold when experimenting and conquering word usage of any type. Words are tools the child learns to use creatively to engage both the reader and author. The greater the child's self concept is, the greater is the chance of a child having the confidence to attempt using their "tools" creatively. As Lewis (1979) states, "children come to school with the need to talk about experiences, write about them, relive them … They are often the most creative pieces the children produce, personal, individual, and full of feeling" (p. 159).

Posting and publishing. Another use of positive feedback in children's writing is posting and publishing a child's work. Children enjoy seeing their work in a public area and take pride in knowing their work was done well. Graves,(1994) asks us, "Recall your writing being posted on

a bulletin board, included in a collection, or published in a school magazine or newspaper" (p. 11). By publicly displaying or publishing students' writing, an instructor is telling students, without words, that their writing abilities are looked upon favorably and others should read their work. This strategy may also help build children's confidence levels when they know that other students and adults are reading, and perhaps, verbally commenting on their writing.

This educator is continually reviewing the writing curriculum to make it as rewarding for students as possible. As previously mentioned in Chapter two, a school in Maine had given a student survey to determine whether the students feel they can write. Due to the students' responses, a change in instruction was needed. As stated by Graves & Stuart, (1985), "After modifying writing instruction in Maine, teachers offered the same student survey two years later (in 1982) and 90% of the students from kindergarten through eighth grade answered yes they can write" (p. 30). By developing a writing curriculum in which children are made to believe their attempts and abilities are valid, the growth seen may be phenomenal. Although assessment is an important instrument, creative language use is a skill that needs to be carefully nurtured and cultivated when

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discussing a writing curriculum.

Creative Language

In the targeted classroom, most students have a strong vocabulary, however the use of their words may be augmented through a variety of positive feedback. Holt,(1989) states, "In still other ways we could make it clear to the children that writing is an extension of the powers they already have, and that they got for themselves: namely the powers of speech" (p. 35). It is up to the influential adults in a child's life to foster a creative use of vocabulary they already have to increase a child's personal vocabulary. Adults have the ability to model, critique, and teach children creative language in everyday situations.

One way educators and adults can help a child develop creative language is to incorporate language rich experiences everywhere possible. Frank, (1979) states, "I believe that a playful but serious language loving teacher can be constantly and subtly building vocabularies, stretching imaginations, strengthening usage skills, and fertilizing enthusiasm for language" (p. 54). Creatively incorporating language activities into classrooms and homes can open a door to a child's creative language. Lewis, (1979) states, "... some of the most important experiences children have, in connection with learning in a school, are those that go on out of school" (p. 58). Adults have the

those that go on out of school" (p. 58). Adults have the capability and knowledge to use their experiences and language creatively with children which is an invaluable practice. The child may interact with the adult in a linguistically imaginative way, and this may create an enriched language experience enjoyed by all individuals involved.

Using creative feedback is a crucial component to a writing program which promotes descriptive language used in writing. Another device used to enhance meaningful language is to transpose the time spent watching television and playing computer games to reading and writing activities.

From Television to Reading

The final strategy to be discussed in dealing with the lack of expressive language in writing is to change the child's focus from television and computer games to reading and writing. Heller, (1991) states, "Knowing how reading and writing are related is important of language, for it helps us to be both efficient and effective in our classroom instruction across all grade levels and all content areas" (p.1-2). Adults can decrease time permitted to be spent on computer games in which language is not the focused skill and increase time spent on activities which literacy is a goal, namely reading and writing. Moreover, literacy activities on the computer are a definite option when

considering improving descriptive language for those children who spend much of their time on a computer.

There are ways to use literacy skills on the computer as an alternative to games. Leonhardt (1997) states, "With students' writing skills, they quickly fall in love with e-mail, and flood their acquaintances with endless messages" (p.62). Sending and receiving communications to friends and family via e-mail is a popular and newer method of utilizing the computer other than for playing games. Computers offer students a medium with an alternative approach to using their language in written form to express themselves.

Topics discussed for possible solutions for students who lack descriptive language skills in their writing are increasing independent reading time, using a variety of teaching strategies and multiple intelligences, using positive feedback, creating language rich experiences, and changing the focus from television and computer games, to reading and writing. Due to the student's lack of expressive and descriptive vocabulary in their individual writing pieces, the targeted fourth grade class will be exposed to all of the topics previously mentioned. The targeted classroom's teacher wanted to help to increase the use of the student's written descriptive expression. The results of the fourth grade student's experiences will be discussed in Chapter 4.

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Project Objective

As a result of targeting the descriptive language in writing, during the period of August, 1999 to December, 1999, the fourth graders will increase the use of detail in writing as measured by teacher and student rubrics, teacher anecdotal records, student reflections, student surveys, and student work samples.

Process Statements

In order to accomplish the targeted objectives, the following processes are necessary:

1. Prepare independent incentives to increase reading time
2. Use a variety of strategies for teaching writing
3. Keep students' and own self-esteem positive

Project Action Plan

I. Data collection for writing portfolios

(Week of August 30)

A. Data from student

1. Student Survey (45 minutes)
2. Student choice writing sample (45 minutes)
3. State created rubric completed independently in whole group (1 hour)

B. Data from teacher

1. Teacher anecdotal record (45 minutes)

2. Teacher completed state created rubric on each child's piece

II. Prepare independent incentives to encourage love of books (Week of August 23 - December, 1999)

A. Student home reading log (75 minutes per week)

B. Student school reading log (45 minutes per week)

C. Student to teacher journals (20 minutes per week)

III. Use a variety of teaching strategies to keep interest high (Aug. - Dec.)

A. At least 20 - 60 minutes per week

1. Poetry

2. Journaling

a. free write

b. assigned writing topic

3. Student Learning Logs (5-10 minutes per day)

4. Writer's workshop

a. free write

b. assigned writing topic

5. Peer editing

a. give feedback

b. ask questions

6. Group writing projects

B. Assessment

1. Rubrics using state standards

2. Group created rubrics
3. Teacher created rubrics
4. Teacher - student conferences
5. Parent - teacher conferences

IV. Keeping self esteem high to promote positive outlook (Aug. - Dec.)

A. Discuss favorite types of writing and why (10 minutes)

B. Discuss challenging types of writing and why (10 minutes)

C. Creativity exercises (15 - 30 minutes per week)

1. What things about this toy dog would you change to make it more fun to play with?
2. Analogies
3. Riddles
4. Writing feelings while music playing
5. Story towers
6. Letters to author, teacher, or friend
7. Student written interpretation of picture
8. Student PMI

V. Data collection to assess effectiveness of interventions (Week of Dec. 13, 1999)

A. Student PMI of own descriptive writing

B. Student survey (Retake)

C. Portfolio Review

1. Teacher anecdotal records

2. Student reflection

D. Final write of same type of writing from August

1. Teacher graded using state standards rubric

2. Student graded using state standards rubric

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of these interventions, students will use descriptive language in the final piece and repeat the writing survey. Growth in the fourth grade classroom will be determined by the comparative scores on the teacher and student graded rubrics. Teacher anecdotal records and student reflection will provide feedback on writing improvement.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase the fourth grade students' ability to use expressive vocabulary in their writing. Numerous strategies were attempted to achieve these objectives such as increasing independent reading time, using a variety of teaching strategies, using effective and positive feedback, and changing the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing.

Increasing Independent Reading Time

Increased attention was given to the students' time spent reading independently. Within the targeted fourth grade classroom an independent reading incentive called 600 Minutes was offered. In order to receive a reward, each student was to meet a predetermined goal of reading for 600 minutes within a certain time frame. Each time a student read independently, a parent or teacher would initial after the student had recorded, on a chart, the amount of time

spent reading. A description and example of the 600 Minute Reading Program may be found in Appendix A. This program was intended to increase an individual student's time spent exposed to a variety of self chosen written literature. As stated earlier, there is a strong relationship between the amount of reading an individual is exposed to and one's vocabulary used in written expression.

The researcher originally planned to incorporate another independent reading program called BOOK IT. Due to a group consensus of teachers at the site the BOOK IT reading incentive was not used. Although this reading program was cancelled, a variety of teaching techniques were used to help the students use expressive language in writing.

Using a variety of teaching strategies

The teacher used a variety of teaching techniques in the targeted fourth grade classroom to foster descriptive writing. The variety of strategies used at the site were some of Gardner's eight intelligences, brainstorming, poetry, journaling, learning logs, and writer's workshop. Use of a variety of instructional strategies was an important concept for the targeted classroom to improve written expression. The first teaching strategy incorporated within this classroom was Gardner's eight intelligences, although not all were emphasized.

Gardner's eight intelligences. Out of all eight intelligences, verbal/linguistic, visual spatial, bodily kinesthetic, musical rhythmic, interpersonal, and naturalist intelligences were the types to be discussed. However, some of the intelligences were used more frequently and successfully than others.

The verbal linguistic intelligence encompasses the use of language and all it's extensions. This intelligence was used throughout the action plan's implementation as it focuses on language usage. Students were constantly directed to use descriptive vocabulary to enhance all written work. This occurred for each writing lesson and at student-teacher conferences which happened during each writing period that the children were to complete any written paper. Although not all of the students were able to meet with the teacher during each lesson, each child had the opportunity to dialogue with the teacher regarding a written piece at least once per week. The intention to use Gardner's verbal linguistic intelligence was to make the students more aware of their descriptive language abilities. Another of Gardner's intelligences used in the study was the visual/spatial intelligence.

Visual/spatial intelligence deals with the ability the students have to create a picture in their minds. In order

to accomplish this, approximately once per month, a randomly selected section or sentence of a student's prewriting piece was read aloud, and the remaining students were to ask questions of the author or draw a picture of the audience's perception. This practice's desired outcome was to make the writer aware that their own described image may be created differently in another student's mind. Perhaps, the author could be more descriptive in order to create the same image in the reader's mind. This activity was completed periodically, at the teacher's discretion, and usually done orally with the entire class. Another teaching strategy used to help increase descriptive writing was the bodily kinesthetic intelligence.

The bodily kinesthetic intelligence was the focus of one activity at the targeted site. Gardner's intelligence was used to complete an expository paragraph on a student chosen exercise. According to Gardner, as stated in Lazear, (1999), people learn best by doing. Thus, the students were asked to explain how to perform an exercise and to describe how they felt completing the exercise. The peer was to follow the directions read aloud by the author. The directions were read aloud to illustrate any missing or poorly phrased procedure. The targeted classroom discussed the outcomes of their first attempt to have a peer follow written directions. After a rewrite of the instructions, the

authors enjoyed more success with the explanation of the chosen exercise. This piece was assessed using student and teacher created rubrics. The targeted students used verbal interaction as an element in Gardner's bodily kinesthetic intelligence for this writing activity. Another strategy used in the study was the musical rhythmic intelligence to foster the use of descriptive language in writing.

The musical rhythmic intelligence deals with an individual's sensitivity to sounds from their environment. In this lesson, the students were to create an acrostic poem using information they had gathered to create a booklet about an animal or plant indigenous to the rain forest. At the onset of the lesson, the teacher played a cassette of sounds of the rain forest and music of the natives of the Amazon Rain Forest. This cassette was used for the duration of the poetry lesson for each session. Then, the teacher wrote an acrostic poem on the front board with the topic of a carnivorous plant. The teacher's information came from a book read aloud to the class about carnivorous plants in the Amazon Rain Forest. The students were to use their own research booklets and notes to create their own acrostic poem. The teacher walked around the class monitoring and giving aid to students in need, while the students worked on their pieces. The poetry lesson took three 45 minute

class sessions to complete. As students finished their poetry writing, they were encouraged to add illustrations pertinent to their topic. This activity was then glued to one half of a 12" x 18" piece of colored construction paper, with the booklet glued to the other half. This was done for ease of display. The acrostic poem was assessed using a teacher created rubric. An example of the rubric can be found in Appendix B. Another intelligence used to increase student's descriptive language in writing is the interpersonal intelligence.

The interpersonal intelligence encompasses the ability to work and communicate with people. The lesson to be discussed deals with following directions to recreate a figure. The students were given one half sheet of paper containing a drawing, and were instructed to write directions for a partner to recreate the same drawing. The students were given 35 minutes in which to write instructions for another person to follow their steps to draw the intended figure. After the 35 minute writing session, the students were to choose a partner and read the instructions aloud to them, while the drawer followed the writer's words in hopes to get matching figures. The teacher's role in this strategy was to offer guidance when students asked for help. The readers were instructed to show little emotion and not to say anything

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extra not found in the writing. After the one partner read their instructions, the roles were reversed, and the other person had the opportunity to read their instructions while the other person drew. When all partnerships had the opportunity to read their instructions and draw their perceptions, the class had a discussion regarding possible solutions to any problems demonstrated in drawing. This lesson took ten minutes longer than the originally allotted writing time of 45 minutes, and was not formally assessed by the teacher. Assessment came in the form of the students' personal impressions regarding successes and discrepancies. The naturalist intelligence was used as another strategy to enhance a student's descriptive language in writing.

The naturalist intelligence deals with one's ability to appreciate the natural creations as opposed to manmade creations. The naturalist intelligence can be illustrated in a poetry lesson completed at the targeted site. The lesson's inception took place inside the classroom with a brainstorming session of natural things that can be found outside the school building, but on the school property. The brainstorming session took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and all suggestions were recorded on the blackboard found in the classroom. The students were directed to select one "natural" item from the list or

another item not listed, but approved by the teacher. The students were then instructed to take out a pencil, piece of paper, and folder to write on. The teacher then proceeded to instruct the class that each person would be choosing one item to be their focus. Once the selection was made, the children were told that the class would be going on a nature walk and their chosen focus would be their goal to find and observe. The students were then directed that through their observations, at least five attributes were to be recorded in a list format. The attributes could be simple words or phrases. The instructor encouraged the students, through their observations and prior knowledge, to not only describe color and size, but characteristics like how it moves, dependencies, physical appearance, or attractiveness. The students were instructed that only 15 minutes would be given for the characteristics to be recorded. Following the 15 minutes, the class was gathered together and seated on the grass. The teacher, using chart paper, colored markers, and her recorded attributes, created a type of poetry called a cinquain. The students were then told that they would be able to create their own cinquain using their findings from their walk. The students were encouraged to find a place away from other students or distractions. Due to the length of instruction and questions to follow, the student's actual poetry was not started until the following day, again

outdoors. The total time for this lesson's completion was three 45 minute sessions, with the third session being final spelling corrections and illustrations added to the individual poems. The assessment used for this activity was a teacher created rubric designed to evaluate naturalist vocabulary and follow a certain pattern. Use of Gardner's identified intelligences was found to be a practical strategy to increase students' descriptive writing. Another technique used in the study was brainstorming.

Brainstorming. In the targeted class, brainstorming consisted of a rapid sharing of ideas or thoughts concerning a given topic which was recorded, either by the teacher or students, usually on the chalk board or overhead transparency. It is frequently completed as a warm up activity in writing. However, in this writing lesson, brainstorming occurred at the opening of the unit and at the conclusion of the unit. The teacher had prepared a large piece of yellow butcher paper, approximately 40" x 60", by dividing the paper into three sections one labelled K (What you know), the middle section labelled W (What you want to know), and L (What you learned). The students were introduced to the term Rain Forest, shown a poster of an enlarged colored drawing of the Rain Forest, and each given a fine lined magic marker, and encouraged to write a

about the Rain Forest. Each student was given the opportunity to write a prior knowledge statement, and if a student needed more than one sentence, they were permitted to do so in the form of another sentence. The students were then told of the W column's purpose, and were encouraged to write a question they would like answered regarding the Rain Forest. The students were then each permitted to write their own inquiry, so long as the same question was not repeated by a previous classmate. Following the K and W activity, the class was gathered around in a seated group on the floor, in front of the bulletin board where the teacher had stapled the large student partially completed KWL Chart. A sharing session occurred. The discussion centered around the class' previous knowledge, as well as the student's own queries about the Rain Forest. Then it was explained to the class that the L column was going to be filled out at the conclusion of the two week unit. This K and W activity had taken 35 minutes, and concluded with the teacher reading a short story about the rain forest called The Great Kapok Tree aloud. In this lesson's entirety, it took approximately 50 minutes to complete, and as it is a work in progress, no assessment was necessary. This final session was completed much like the first K and W session with the markers, however each student was to write one descriptive statement about what they learned in the course of the unit.

statement about what they learned in the course of the unit. Each student was encouraged to use as much descriptive vocabulary as made sense in their own statement, due to the fact that points would be given for extra credit towards their final grade on the unit. One point was earned, per descriptive (underlined) word, in a sentence, which depicted something learned during the Rain Forest Unit. Brainstorming the L column was completed at the end of the two week unit on the Rain Forest, in one 45 minute session. Another teaching technique used in the targeted fourth grade to increase vivid language in writing was poetry.

Poetry. In the targeted class, poetry was used throughout the study in different forms, however, in this lesson four line rhyming poems were the goal. The first poetry session opened with a brainstorming discussion in which pairs of words which rhymed were the topic. Various pairs of words shared by the students were recorded on the board in the front of the classroom. The students were then gathered seated on the floor in front of the seated teacher, and told to listen for rhymes, then Fox on Sox was read aloud. The students then returned to their seats. The students were to come up with words and phrases which remind them of the fall season, the thoughts were recorded on an overhead in a list form. Then the students were challenged to come up with words which rhyme with the previously listed

fall words. The rhyming words were written, sometimes listed directly next to the original thoughts. This list was not completed in the first 45 minute session, however, was completed in the second session, where a four line rhyming poem was also created by the teacher and students in class. The students were directed to make their own poem with the topic of fall, and it had to be a four line rhyme. The students were then free to complete a poem on their own, although they were permitted to use some of the vocabulary on the overhead transparency, which was still left on. The teacher walked around, monitored, and offered assistance to any student needing it. This lesson consumed three 45 minute writing sessions to complete, and was evaluated by a teacher created rubric. Poetry was used in this lesson to increase awareness of the changing season and all the possible sensations that it brings. One more technique used in the targeted classroom was using learning logs as a daily practice.

Learning logs. Learning log usage in the targeted classroom created a metacognitive look at the school day, as well as a reference tool for further writing. At the end of each school day the students would share, with the teacher recording on the front board, subject by subject what was learned that day. The teacher would help paraphrase or ask questions regarding what was shared by the students. The

students were then to choose at least one subject to write three sentences using any new vocabulary dealt with to describe the day's activities. This daily activity began taking 25 minutes in August at it's inception, and decreased in time to 15 minutes by late December at it's conclusion of the study. The students' learning logs were also used as a reference tool as a culminating expository paper used as a monthly letter to their parents. The paper was completed at the end of each month and written as a personal letter to their parents informing them of their accomplishments at school month's end. The paper's format was the familiar topic sentence, three sentences describing the 3 focuses of what was to be discussed, and a closing for the paragraph. The (minimum of) middle three paragraphs had basically the same format of a topic sentence introducing the learning experience, a description of the learning that took place in at least three sentences, and a closing for each paragraph. In the final paragraph, the students were to create a clever way to generalize each paragraph in one sentence, and use topic and concluding sentences in their proper places. The learning log was used as a reference tool for every student at the end of each month when it came time to write the letter to parents. The students used the learning log to recall the various learning experiences using the

descriptive language used daily in the three sentences of the log. The teacher made copies of each letter each month, assessed the letters using a teacher created rubric, which used the state standards as a guideline for it's creation. This rubric was familiar to the students as they had been evaluated for other writings using the same expository writing rubric throughout the study, which can be found in Appendix C. The targeted site used learning logs in a daily routine to enrich students vocabulary in writing. The final writing strategy to be discussed is the use of writer's workshop.

Writer's workshop. Writer's workshop was used every Tuesday and Thursday for an hour each session at the targeted fourth grade classroom. Each writer's workshop had at least four adults in the room including the teacher, and every Tuesday session, there was an additional teacher who serviced one student in the targeted class having an IEP. The additional teacher, when not working with the special needs student, also circulated about the room and worked with other students requesting assistance. The Thursday lesson consisted of a discussion about vivid and colorful words about certain nouns. Then the teacher led discussion towards colorful adjectives and adverbs about themselves. The students were directed to write a list of ten words or short phrases describing themselves. The students were

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directed to begin a description of themselves using as many elaborate yet accurate terms as possible. The four adults circulated about the room offering guidance or suggestions to students asking for help. The next writer's workshop began as a refresher minilesson on colorful vocabulary meant to help the students get into a colorful state of mind. The remainder of the workshop was time for the students to complete their own colorful self-description. The adults this and the following session were positioned in the corners of the room each at a desk available for individual conferences at the child's discretion. This writing was to be evaluated based on the student and teacher created rubric developed the Friday after the Thursday of the first adjective and adverb lesson. The third writer's workshop session of the lesson allowed the students who were ready, and had at least one adult read and conference about the piece all the way to it's completion, write a final draft. The students who were not ready to begin a final draft of the piece were permitted to continue their descriptions. The final description was to be completed by the end of the following workshop period for collection and assessment by the teacher using the previously mentioned rubric. Writers workshop was used on a regular basis for the duration of the study whose objective was to increase descriptive vocabulary

in students writing. Another technique used in the study was to use effective and positive feedback when dealing with a student's written work.

Effective and Positive Feedback

Using effective and positive feedback when dealing with a student's piece was a strategy used throughout the study in the targeted class. The approaches used in the study include rubrics, positive writing experiences through sharing, posting and publishing, and creative language exercises.

Rubric use. A rubric is an assessment tool used in scoring a student's performance of a variety of classroom activities. Rubrics can be shared and even created before a project's onset, or after a project's completion. In this particular lesson the teacher and students created a rubric for a research booklet. On the overhead, the teacher started the lesson by writing Plant/Animal Rubric with a green marker. The students settled in and discussed the purpose of a rubric as showing a goal to work towards, and the teacher explained that an evaluative tool was needed for their research booklets. The students and teacher worked out a rubric that was acceptable to both the student and teacher, to be used by the teacher. To discuss and create an appropriate rubric, this lesson took 45 minutes for the targeted fourth grade to accomplish. A copy of the

Plant/Animal rubric used can be found in Appendix D. After the rubric had been neatly organized by the teacher, a copy of it was given to each of the students to use as a reference while working on their research booklets. It was predetermined that the teacher was to be the one person grading the booklets using the rubrics, but the students persuaded the teacher to average the students own score and the teacher's score using the rubric. Rubric use to help descriptive writing was used in the targeted fourth grade classroom. Another strategy to offer positive feedback was to share written pieces with other peers or adults.

Sharing. In the targeted fourth grade sharing written work was done between peers and between students and adults. The concept of sharing to enhance writing skills was introduced to the class during a writing lesson in early September, but not consistently reinforced in class writing lessons. The sharing of one's individual writing in the targeted site was done on a very informal basis, usually on a piece done for a grade or in writer's workshop. During one 45 minute writing period per month, students were permitted to write on any topic or on any piece that they chose. Another technique used in the study to incorporate effective and positive feedback was to post or publish students' work.

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Posting or publishing. Posting a student's work, at the targeted site, consisted of taping or stapling a final project to a wall in the hallway or bulletin board. Publishing a student's work, at the targeted site, consisted of writing an article for a classroom newspaper. The students had many opportunities each month to work on a writing project that would be on display, however, the example to be discussed deals with publishing. The class read a novel called Trouble River, and were to write an article from the perspective of one of the characters in the novel. The article must discuss occurrences from the novel, and was to be no longer than one page on notebook paper. Each student was permitted to draw one character's name from a hat and from there was to write a description of something that happened in the novel. This activity took two 45 minute writing sessions to complete, then the students were brought down to the computer lab in the building where they prepared a typewritten final copy of their article. This keyboarding activity consumed one 45 minute writing session. The teacher compiled the typewritten articles onto a double sided two page newspaper which was copied and distributed to the other two fourth grade sections at the site. The use of publishing and/or posting was used consistently during the study, although the use of creative language exercises was used as well.

Creative language exercises. Creative language exercises encompassed all curricular subjects at the site. The example to be discussed dealt with was a verbal exercise completed in two 45 minute sessions. The students were each given a different volume of a National Geographic magazine, and asked to choose a photo to describe taking on the perspective of one of the characters in the photo. The students each had the opportunity to come before the class and describe the photo using as many descriptive words as possible. As the students came before their peers, they were to write as many descriptive or emotion filled words as they could think of on the board, as a backdrop for their 1-2 minute oral speech. The assessment for this activity was a teacher created rubric completed by the teacher, although was shared and discussed with the students directly after the magazines were distributed. The teacher allowed the students 15 minutes to choose a photo and mentally prepare what was to be shared with the class. The final strategy used to achieve the goal of using descriptive vocabulary in writing was to change the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing.

From Television to Reading

Television and computer games are popular pastimes for many of the fourth grade students at the targeted site. It

was a goal of the teacher to transpose the amount of time spent watching television and playing computer games to reading and writing. The teacher asked the students to record in their learning logs the amount of time spent watching television, the amount of time spent playing computer games, using email, reading, and writing from the evening before. The students did not complete this record keeping for the entire study, however the students' frequency of using email did increase.

As the goal of this study was to increase the fourth grade students' ability to use expressive vocabulary in their writing, a number of techniques were used by the researcher in the targeted classroom. Among the various strategies used in the project were increasing independent reading time, using a variety of strategies, using effective and positive feedback, and changing the focus from television and computer games to reading and writing. The results of the action project are to be discussed in the following section

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the study's interventions to evaluate students use of descriptive language in their final written piece, the researcher utilized many tools. The students at the targeted site repeated the same writing survey taken in August, student

checklists and work samples were collected and analyzed, and teacher checklists and anecdotal records were used in the data collection and analysis of results for the project implementation. The first instrument used in the assessment was the student survey.

Student Survey

In order to assess the effects of the program to increase students' descriptive vocabulary in writing, student surveys were given in August and in December. Table 3 shows the percentages of students' opinions when asked if they felt they could write descriptively.

Table 3

Do kids feel they can write descriptively?

Answer	Aug.% of students	Dec.% of students
Yes	71.4	86.6
No	19.1	3.2
Sometimes	9.5	11.2

The results of the survey showed that by the end of the study, there was an increase in the percentage of students who felt they had the ability to write descriptively. The students answering yes to whether they feel they can write descriptively increased by 14.4%. There was a decrease in the number of students who felt they were unable to write descriptively. A noticeable decline of 15.9% was shown in this instance. The results of the "sometimes" response was a 1.7% difference in December. There was an increase from

the percentage in August in the percentage of students who felt they could write descriptively. Another tool used in the research was a teacher checklist.

Teacher Checklist

The teacher checklist was used to monitor students' interaction and effort yielded during certain activities. The teacher checklist was used once a week for the first three weeks, and again once a week for the final three weeks of the study. The results of the tallied checklists have been compiled and assimilated from August, and December. Table 4 shows the results in percentages.

Table 4

Teacher Checklist Indicators and Results

Indicators	Yes/Aug.	No/Aug.	Yes/Dec.	No/Dec.
-Students work independently.	45%	55%	65%	35%
-Students use resources.	49%	51%	93%	27%
-Descriptive language used.	39%	61%	88%	12%
-Minor spelling & punctuation errors.	47%	53%	79%	21%
-Correct use of structure.	38%	62%	77%	23%

The checklist results indicate a gain in all areas. Another evaluative tool used in the study was the student checklist.

Student Checklist

The student checklist was an optional evaluative tool for the researcher used to gather information on the students' interpretation of and individual effort required for a particular writing lesson. Table 5 shows the results of the students' who chose to complete the checklist for various types of writings in the targeted site.

Table 5

Student Checklist Results

	Types of Writing Activities			
Indicators	Poetry	Journals	Papers	Learning Logs
-Enjoyed activity.	64%	80%	29%	60%
-Challenging activity.	89%	30%	92%	49%
-Used descriptive vocabulary	87%	46%	43%	65%
-Used outside sources as an aid.	34%	0%	82%	5%
-Grammar, spelling, and punctuation checked by adult.	68%	2%	100%	6%
-Conferenced with peer or adult during writing.	44%	0%	100%	0%

The students were able to complete a checklist after each writing lesson which was read by the teacher to help evaluate the students' perception of a particular lesson.

Due to the fact that it was an optional task, the total number of student checklists completed each writing session varied from 10 to 21.

The results of the completed checklists showed the majority of the students enjoyed all of the writing genres except for the longer papers. The students most enjoyed the student to teacher dialogue journals. As far as the challenging activities the papers received the most tallies with 92%, and the least challenging was the student/teacher journals. The students expressed when the activity required descriptive writing, poetry was the location expressive vocabulary was used most frequently. When the writing activity was a lengthy paper 82% of the students felt there was the need for the outside help of some resource. On the checklist, the students cited the sources used as encyclopedias, the internet, and library reference books on their checklist. The sources the students' used for their writing was requested by the researcher when the students who chose to complete the checklist. When recalling their focus of grammar, spelling, and punctuation of the piece all of the students who completed the survey had an adult check for any errors before going to final draft. A small percentage of the students who completed the survey were concerned with grammar, spelling, and punctuation when

writing in their dialogue journals. The results of Table 4 also show when conferencing with a peer or adult occurred, all of the students depended on another individual to discuss aspects of the piece. However, while completing the dialogue journals and learning logs none of the students conferenced with an adult or peer. The optional student checklist was found to be a practical tool in the examination of the student's thought during descriptive writing. Another evaluative tool used in the study was teacher anecdotal records.

Teacher Anecdotal Records

Teacher anecdotal records, a PMI record form, was used throughout the study at each writing session to gather data regarding the students' growth in descriptive writing skills. The researcher, using a PMI, noticed the fluctuation from the minus column to the plus column during the study's progression. An example of a completed PMI form can be found in Appendix E. In early September, the information collected by the researcher was more negative observations of the students during writing sessions. As the study progressed, the negative comments decreased, whereas the positive observations increased. Through the study not only did the plus column increase in the PMIs, but the students' letter grades in writing improved as well. In addition to the preceding methods of assessment, student work samples

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were gathered and carefully assessed as well.

Student Work Samples

Student work samples were taken from one writing activity completed at the beginning of the study, then after the same lesson at the study's completion in December. The lesson consisted of a class discussion and instruction, then a writing period in which the teacher walked around the classroom offering assistance where needed. The work samples revealed a substantial increase in the use of descriptive vocabulary within the piece written in December, when compared to the student's piece written in August. The teacher tallied each descriptive vocabulary choice from each student's piece and compared the results from their August piece to their December work. Of the 21 students participating, every student's tally number increased from their first work to the same assigned work completed at the study's conclusion. The students' first work indicated an average number of 4 descriptive words per paragraph written, while the averaged number tripled to 12 descriptive words per paragraph written in December. All of the students' work samples chosen to examine growth of descriptive vocabulary for this piece was shared with the students. After a discussion, the researcher noted the happiness of the student's personal results, when comparing the two

works.

The results and analysis of the action plan to increase descriptive vocabulary in students' writing has been discussed. The conclusions drawn and recommendations for improving the implementations of interventions will be discussed in the following section.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researcher's overall summation of the project dealing with the improvement in descriptive vocabulary usage in writing was a success. Student surveys showed a more positive feeling about their own ability to write descriptively. Student checklists were completed by the students, who chose to do so, to show favorable growth in the students' expressive terminology. Work samples were selected by the teacher, completed by each student, and used in a comparative application which showed growth and improvement. Teacher checklists and anecdotal records all showed the project's success. The first conclusion to be discussed is student surveys.

Student Surveys

The student surveys showed the study's implementation was successful. The students felt positively about their abilities to write descriptively. By the end of the study, the student's felt they were able to write well using descriptive and emotional vocabulary. The 21 students

surveyed felt their descriptive writing improved in December as opposed to how they felt about their abilities to use descriptive vocabulary in August. As previously quoted from Tiedt (1983), "Children engaged in writing, must feel they can succeed" (p.3) The students participating in the study feel they are capable writers, and did benefit from the study to improve their descriptive writing. The student survey's results represented the students' own perception of their written work. The student survey was a valuable tool to evaluate students' opinions of their descriptive writing and is a recommended tool for other researchers to use.

The researcher endorses the use of student surveys in a program to increase descriptive vocabulary in writing. The surveys were a non threatening method of self evaluation to show growth by a student, as it was completed anonymously. Some students did choose to write their name on their survey, which did not effect the outcome of the results. One strength of the survey was the freedom the child had to express their own feelings of their writing without any repercussions by a peer or the researcher. The students' responses were their own words and reactions to their developing writing skills. One weakness of the survey was the students' simple yes or no responses without any sort of reflection or explanation to the surveyed question. If the

researcher checked each survey for completeness as it was returned, the survey may be construed as an assignment, and the students' responses may be altered due to the fact that the papers were "checked." The researcher decided not to check the papers due to the alterations which may be included by the students. The survey was found to be a practical tool for assessing the targeted students' insights into how they write using descriptive vocabulary and the student's individual language growth as a result of the project's implementation. The student survey was found to be a beneficial measurement device for the researcher, as well as the students. Another evaluative instrument used in the study was the teacher checklist.

Teacher Checklist

The teacher checklist showed much descriptive writing growth in the targeted site. Each monitored writing behavior was found to have increased at the termination of the project. Using the checklist, the researcher concluded the students' writing abilities were enhanced through the project's execution. The researcher used the checklist for measuring students' growth through the project's implementation. The results of the checklist showed growth in all areas relevant to descriptive writing.

The teacher checklist is a recommended intervention to show students' growth in descriptive writing. The use of

the checklist could be altered to be used for each writing lesson, as opposed to once a week for the beginning three weeks and the final three weeks of the study. The researcher may include space for comments regarding the weekly or daily lesson. Recording comments may make a difference in drawing conclusions or making suggestions for future writing lessons. One strength of the checklist may be considered when the indicators were checked in December, the teacher was able to see growth in students' abilities to work independently. As the number of students who had the ability to work independently had grown, so did their ability to use descriptive language. In the researcher's opinion, the weakness of the intervention was the lack of space permitted for comments regarding the writing activities. In addition, indicators for the instructor's behavior could be advantageous. As Norton and Norton (1999) state, "Teachers frequently benefit from completing self-evaluation inventories in which they assess their own behaviors and analyze how well these behaviors enrich a literature based curriculum and help students understand and appreciate literature" (p.4). This checklist should be an ongoing work in progress and should be altered to meet writing goals set by the classroom teacher. A further method of assessment used in the study was teacher

anecdotal records.

Teacher Anecdotal Records

The researcher used a Plus, Minus, and Interesting form to gather data to assess the growth of students' descriptive writing skills. The researcher concluded the targeted students' descriptive writing skills did improve as the P column's reports did increase and the M column decreased. The researcher determined that students' inclusion in anecdotal record keeping was found to be beneficial in measuring student growth. The PMI form was a workable assessment method. As Fogarty (1994) states, " It is a viable, quick study of a situation that fosters a complete look because it asks for opposing views" (p. 193). Not only did the PMI anecdotal form show an improvement in writing skills, but their individual writing percentages improved as well. There was a definite correlation between the PMI form and the students' descriptive graded written pieces. In general, keeping records of writing behaviors and percentages showed to be a favorable assessment method.

This researcher endorses the use of PMI forms to eff ctively assess students' descriptive writing skills. However, as no classrooms of students are the same, some alterations will be suggested. Some suggestions are to have students complete a PMI form after a one day lesson, after each session of an entire writing lesson, or have a peer

partner execute the form after the completion of a project. In this study, the students may have completed their own PMI form for all of the writing activities and felt positive about their work. As Burke (1999) states, "This strategy helps students become independent thinkers and critical self evaluators of their learning" (p.132). Additionally, student work samples did help support the success of the writing program.

Student Work Samples

Student work samples were collected by the researcher in order to indicate growth in use of descriptive language in writing. The samples assembled for the study consisted of pieces the students wrote at the study's inception and the same writing session at it's conclusion. Everyone involved with the study was amazed with the conclusions which were drawn. The researcher concluded the collection of student work samples indicated an increase of descriptive and definitive vocabulary at the conclusion of the study. By tallying the vivid descriptors in the opening and final piece written by the students, the researcher and students were able to compare vocabulary choices and volume of those choices.

Collecting student work samples is advocated by the researcher. The collection of student samples has been

practiced by many teachers with many deviations from the method used in this study. Student selected writing pieces may have been used in the study to evaluate descriptive writing improvement. Student chosen pieces may be kept in a writing portfolio for the teacher and student to view and gather information. This option allows the student to choose which pieces are included in a collection, which allows the student to showcase just their best work. Another modification to gathering work samples is to keep pre-writing drafts including suggestions made of all of the students' written pieces. As Burke (1999) states, "By viewing the 'not so best' work, the audience gets a truer picture of the students strengths and weaknesses" (p.65). The collection of work samples should illustrate a clear directive for students' improvement. The compilation of the students' work samples in the study had a definite objective to achieve, and the study's results reveal the successfulness of the project implementations.

The goal of this research project was to improve the descriptive vocabulary in writing for one fourth grade class. Specifically taught language and writing strategies were implemented in order to achieve this goal. This particular plan appeared to have a positive impact on the targeted group at a local level. Based on the fact that lacking language and writing skills has generated concern in

standardized educational testing on a national level, a plan such as this one could be implemented by both regular and special education teachers to improve the descriptive vocabulary of their students. Although the debate over the most effective ways to teach writing still exists, this intervention has shown that the use of research based strategies used on a continual basis indicate an increase in student's abilities to use clear and vivid terminology when writing. In summation, absent descriptive writing abilities in children is an ongoing problem in schools today. Therefore, to effectively address this problem, it is important that educators be flexible and innovative in their techniques to teach descriptive writing.

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APPENDIX A

600 MINUTE READING PROGRAM

★ REDEMPTION DATES: JUNE 17 TO AUGUST 6, 2000 ★ REDEMPTION DATES: JUNE 17 TO AUGUST 6, 2000

Dear Family

Here's how your student can become a winner in the 600-Minute Reading Club and receive a free admission to a Six Flags Theme Park:

Congratulations from Six Flags Theme Parks! Your child is on the way to becoming a winner in the Read To Succeed® 600-Minute Reading Club™. If your child reads for fun for 600 minutes, or ten hours, and returns his or her reading tally sheet(s) to the teacher by the date written in below, he or she will earn one free admission to a Six Flags Theme Park.

Have your child use the special Read To Succeed tally sheet to write down what he or she has read and the amount of time spent reading. When your child completes 600 minutes of reading, sign the tally sheet(s). Have your child return the tally sheet(s) to the teacher by the date at the bottom of this letter. Reading to complete school assignments does not count toward the 600 minutes! But your child can read to him/herself, read to someone else, or have someone read to him or her. Free admission coupons will be distributed to winners at their school before the end of the school year.

Here is some important information to remember:

1. Your child must be in grades K-6 (pre-K not included) and in a school receiving the Read To Succeed program.
2. The free admission coupon cannot be replaced if it is lost or destroyed.
3. Your child's free admission coupon must be used between **JUNE 17 AND AUGUST 6, 2000**. (No other dates will be allowed.) Free admission coupons are not valid on Saturday during the redemption period at Six Flags Over Georgia. Coupons are NOT valid at Six Flags safari or water parks.
4. The free admission coupon is your child's and will admit only him or her. It is invalid if it is sold or given away to another person.

SixFlags

READ to Succeed

Return your tally sheet(s) to the teacher by:

_____

(date to be filled in by Reading Club Coordinator)

★ REDEMPTION DATES: JUNE 17 TO AUGUST 6, 2000 ★ ★ REDEMPTION DATES

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600-Minute Reading Club is a registered trademark of Six Flags Theme Parks Inc.

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Turn in these tally sheets to your teacher by: _____
(date to be filled in by Reading Club Coordinator)

Six Flags READ To Succeed

Spend at least 600 minutes, or ten hours, reading just for fun. Reading to complete school assignments does not count! But reading for this Club does include reading to yourself, reading to someone else, or having someone else read to you.

Use this tally sheet to list the time you spend reading and to keep track of the books, magazines, and other things you read. Have your teacher or parent initial every time you read, as proof that you have done the reading. If you need more space, attach extra tally sheets.

Once you have done 600 minutes of reading, have your parents sign your tally sheet(s). Turn your tally sheet(s) in to your teacher by the date shown above in order to qualify for your free admission to a Six Flags Theme Park.

DATE	NAME OF BOOK, MAGAZINE, OR NEWSPAPER	MINUTES OF READING	TEACHER/PARENT INITIALS

Student's full name_____ Address_____ Grade _____

School's full name_____ Grade _____ Total minutes _____

FOR THE PARENT:

I certify that this student has completed 600 minutes of reading for recreation. I am aware that the student free admission coupon is valid only between **June 17 — August 6, 2000.** (Free admission coupons are not valid on Saturday during the redemption period at Six Flags Over Georgia. Coupons are not valid at Six Flags safari or water parks.)

Parent's Signature_____

The free admission coupons must be used between June 17 and August 6, 2000.

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APPENDIX B

ACROSTIC RUBRIC

Acrostic
Plant/Animal Rubric

Criteria:	3	2	1
Spelling	No spelling errors	3 or less errors	4 or more errors
Accuracy of Information	All info. accurate	2 or less accuracy errors	3 or more accuracy errors
Attractiveness	Many vivid colors and graphics	3 colors & adequate graphics	Minimal or no colors or graphics
Legibility	Makes sense, Interesting, Descriptive	Obvious errors	Scratched out errors

Total Score / Total Possible /12

APPENDIX C

EXPOSITORY RUBRIC

Expository

Outcomes	Standard Descriptors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Focus	Subject is confusing or absent, insufficient writing	Subject limited, unclear, drift from focus, insuff. writing	Subject in opening, prompt dependent over promise or over deliver	Subject identified, minor focus drifts, maintains subject	Purpose clearly set, closing present, logic throughout,	Clear & maintained purpose, effective closing
Support	Absent or confusing, insufficient writing	undeveloped limited, or unclear, list of unrelated specifics	most support is general, list focus not developed	some support detailed, lacks depth	most support detailed, some depth, word choice enhances	All support detailed, depth evident, word choice enhances specificity
Organization	confusing, little or no structure no ¶	Structure is attempted, limited little structure within ¶	noticeable structure, inapp. ¶ major digression	structure is evident, major points app. ¶ coherence and cohesion, simple transition	1 sentence open & close, some varied sentence structure, minor digressions	open & close 2+ sent., trans devices are not redundant or intrusive, varied sent. structure
Conventions	no mastery of sentence structure, many invented spellings, verb/noun not in agreement, many punctuation/ capitalization errors, many major errors in proportion to amount written			Mastery of sentences construction, few invented spelling of uncommon words, mastery of basic verb/noun agreement, mastery of basic punctuation & caps few major errors in proportion to amt		
Integration	doesn't fulfill assign., barely deals with topic, insuff. writing	attempts to address assign. some confusion inapp. text structure	partially developed, some features not formed, but all are present, inference req'd	bare bones, simple, clear, only essentials, limited depth	developed, all features are not equally developed throughout	fully developed clear and purposeful focus

APPENDIX D

PLANT/ANIMAL RUBRIC

Rain Forest Plant/Animal Research Product

Rubric

Criteria:	1	2	3	4
- Content	3 or more errors	2 factual errors	1 factual error	All info. is correct
- Artwork	No colors	2 colors	3 colors	Many colors
	No graphics	Minimal graphics	Adequate graphics	Many vivid graphics
- Neatness	Scratches out errors	Many obvious errors	Minimal errors	Clear and easy to read
Knowledge	Unable to answer questions	Able to answer with help	Know where to look for answers	Able to answer all questions
	-Minimal descriptions	-Uneven descriptions	-Adequate descriptions	-Vivid descriptions

Total Score/Total Possible ___/24

APPENDIX E

PMI FORM

Actions Taken: Topic: Rainforest Plant/Animal Research Booklet

Week of 91 October 25-29

1. Showed list of Rain Forest Plants and Animals.
2. Each child chose one plant or animal.
3. Discussed elements to be researched (habitat; life span; endangered?; if R.F. was destroyed, where would it survive?; interesting facts).
4. Shared rubric and discussed (each child received a copy for own R.F. portfolio.
5. Showed teacher's own research booklet as example.
6. Began research (only had 10 minutes)

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)
- High interest. - Excitement generated when sharing new knowledge with peers.	- IEP students had difficulty keeping on task.	- Lack of encyclopedia knowledge and how to use. - Some used dictionaries.

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed):